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ABSTRACT

Since World War II the United States has become the leader among Western industrial countries in attempting to export its own educational values to developing nations. United States policies, however, have not been based on careful consideration of the specific political, economic, and social realities of these nations. As a result, the educational models and practices of the United States and other industrial nations have met with increasing resistance in developing nations. Despite increased suspicions regarding the intentions of the large industrial nations, developing nations continue to favor strengthened professional relationships. Such international cooperation can flourish in education and other areas, however, only if the industrial nations learn to accept cultural diversity and test their own research paradigms against culturally specific empirical observations from developing nations as well as their own. As a result of such observation and testing, paradigm shifts will occur that will advance knowledge and enable us to meet challenges in education worldwide. (JBM)

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THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education is inextricably interwoven into the fabric of culture. Culture represents the influence of experience of the people and institutions within the population it represents. Cultural diversity abounds within and between nations. Yet, there are similarities in the processes and products of education which pervade diverse as well as similar cultural histories. The developing nations have historically patterned and are currently patterning educational enterprises upon the models of their colonizers or upon the industrial nations upon whom they depend. Large, influential industrial nations can influence the destinies of developing nations as they export educational research, theories, and explicit educational processes in accord with the traditional assistance/intervention model. Education must be culturally specific if it is to be culturally relevant. The notion of culture-free educational models must be challenged. Practices must be conceptualized and tested representative of the populations to which they are to be applied. Assistance/intervention practices will then be replaced by transactional/interactive practices which will be sensitive to the evidences of cultural diversity. Educational paradigms will be considered within the context of culture. As these experiences are recorded in research, appropriate anomalies will be detected and the necessary paradigms shifts will advance knowledge and practice to meet the challenge of an emergent world community.

THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Following World War II industrial nations were thrust into an assumed posture of leadership with other nations of the world. The bearers of contemporary civilization viewed themselves as political, economic, and social benevolents assuming the right and responsibility to proselytize among the other nations. The diffusion of the values of large industrialized nations began to have an effect upon the process of modernization throughout the world (Butts, 1967).

The United States was the assumed leader in the Western Hemisphere after World War II. Educationally, international experiences in the United States were largely limited to pre and post World War II missionary efforts and small-scale colonialism. To extrapolate these experiences into national policies regarding advising and assisting in the development of educational systems of other nations was widely accepted. The United States did not build bodies of knowledge about the political, economic, and social domains of the nations with which they have become involved. Education became a product the United States exported with little consideration of the unique nature of and differences in the value structures of the nations they aspired to assist. It was assumed that the expansion of the educational system as it became to be known in the United States was the integral means of achieving the highest order of a quality life. Educational opportunity was the means through which nations progressed. From this point-of-view the educator could be viewed

as contributing to the noblest of ideals associated with social, economic, and political welfare. Such a process was thought of as the way to proliferate democracy and contribute equality in all dimensions of social life. Education was viewed as the widely-acknowledged panacea for poverty, economic stagnation, totalitarianism, and inequality. The hope envisioned for developing nations came through the envisioned acceptance of these epistemological assumptions as a means of achieving prosperity, freedom, and equality through the institution of education (Levin, 1979).

Knowledge, and its methods of acquisition, are not commodities like our material exports which are traded upon the international marketplace. The dissemination and acquisition of knowledge is inextricably interwoven into the fabric of the culture and, thus, is associated with the value domain of the culture it represents. Human experience is contextually dependent and can only be understood within the contexts it occurs (Mishler, 1979). Failure to recognize this has yielded results of the industrialized nation's efforts to assist developing nations as imperalistic, colonialistic gestures of the strong over the weak (Carnoy, 1974; Memmi, 1969). This is an image we can no longer afford in a modern world where international collaboration is imperative. Furthermore, it is becoming increasing apparent to those of us who have lived and taught in other nations that the current assumption of the generalizability of our educational models is both morally wrong and scientifically primitive. A massive contradiction exists in that the notion of the contextual dependency of meaning has not only been excluded in the exportation of educational training program models but also from the traditions of theory and research in the field of education.

Effective programs of technical assistance in international affairs rest upon an awareness and appreciation of the diversities of life in the nations

to which assistance is directed. Assistance programs which transcend charity are sustained by an awareness of both the unique and common aspects of nations. Education is the critical domain to foster and demonstrate such international-mindedness. Effective technical assistance necessitates that education assume the responsibility of developing a comparative approach to the study of education. A significant aspect of this responsibility can be addressed through a comprehensive and robust cross-cultural analysis of education. This aspiration transcends culturally specific technologies of education and approaches what Burke (1965) refers to as "style," i.e., a scheme of what-goes-with-what as an approach to the relativity of what works. Bronfenbrenner (1977) challenges researchers to study variable domains of interest in multiple contexts and test the range of circumstances generalizations hold.

The organization and administration of education reflects sharp differences among nations. The character of the plan for organizing and administering education is established basically by the political-economic philosophy of the nation. Thus, nations demonstrate through their educational institutions evidence of administrative approaches ranging from authoritarianism to participative democracy. However, this constitutes a conceptual base which is likely complicated by a current assumption that education is more sacred than secular; that it transcends its cultural context; that it is the "contemporary church of the state" (Illich, 1970). Parsons (1959) complicates the assumption methodologically as he discusses the "value-science integrate" as it relates to the problem of explaining the sources of ideological variance. Berger describes the responsibility of the student of comparative education when he states:

> For most of us, as we grow up, and learn to live in society, its forms take on an appearance of structures as self-evident and as solid as those of the natural cosmos (1961, pp. 10-11).

Although this rationale presents no conceptual justification for the current trend to export educational assumptions in the form of assumed generalizable models, it does describe the complexity of a consideration for a comparative study of education.

Our conceptual bases for education in the United States are derived largely from the empirical edification of educational traditions. Even though our concerns have been, broadly speaking, based upon the spectrum of social and behavioral science models, these models are fundamentally empirically oriented and, thus, subject to the indictment of cultural specificity. The very use of the word "model" apparently pacifies some into a state of justification of the exportation of common-sense elaborated in our empirically-based and culturally specific theories. This could be in part due to what Conquest (1978) refers to as the "systematization fallacy," i.e., inflated theorizing being treated as though it was established doctrine. The assumption of cultural generalizability even further extends the contradiction.

In summary, it is apparent that the industrial nations of the West have exported or have attempted to export their fundamental assumptions regarding education to other nations. The question remains: Can educational models and practice be transferred intact across cultural boundaries?

Observations

As nations of the world develop in technology, industrialization, and considerations for the general welfare of people, they become more dependent upon an internationalism which fosters the creation and distribution of knowledge. Written materials circulate across international boundries. Experts exchange ideas and skills. Students travel and study abroad. People begin to perceive their interrelatedness and their interdependence. Social institutions become

engaged in the circulation and dissemination of knowledge between nations. International agencies such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the World Bank, and various private foundations encourage and support international interrelatedness.

Developing nations find themselves importing far more in the domain of the acquisition of knowledge than is exported. World trade in knowledge seems to flow from the industrialized nations to the developing nations, and there would appear to be strong evidence to suggest an unfavorable balance of payments. This places developing nations in a position of entrapment perhaps more subtle but not unlike the dependency experienced in colonial eras (Mende, 1973; Cockcroft, et. al., 1972).

Less industrialized, developing nations are structurally vulnerable (Goulet, 1971). Established values in these nations are vulnerable to the ethnocentric intentions of the exporters of change to promote the conversion of value orientations to those of the "neocolonizers." This becomes particularly evident in view of the ruling political elites in most developing nations which are closely allied with the power elites in industrial nations. These elites frequently respond to pressures and influence for favors even when not in ideologically agreement.

Tampering with the values of social groups has the potential of cultural annihilation and carries the brand of cultural imperialism. Promoters of international education appear to be aware of such dangers, at least in their rhetoric, yet the impact of their own cultural values imprints their efforts both substantively and methodologically. In the field of education in the United States, for example, we export the influence of our experience in the form of our literature, research, and theory, extrapolating it benevolently to the "have-nots." The morality of the "haves" giving to the "have-nots" is deeply socialized into our traditions in the United States.

Furthermore, the nature of capitalism is such that it consistently imbues upon its followers the responsibility to exploit domains of interaction, particularly the political and economic. Thus, we go forth armed with our knowledge ready to share; a knowledge frequently culture-bound and value-laden We market our products in the international educational arena with political-economic implications which are to our benefit and less often to benefit those with whom we relate. We proselytize to convert and reform to our assumed status of superiority. Efforts under these circumstances have failed, are currently failing and will continue to fail in international education. Our benefactors are aware of our intentions and our failures. Most of us who have worked in international education are hard pressed to produce robust evidence of any large scale successes. The epistemological issue of the a priori or the necessity to examine the non-empirical elements in knowledge and account for them in terms of reason has been largely culturally specific and rarely considered as meaning in context.

On the optimistic side, there is evidence, in parts of the world at least, that the characteristic susceptability to the blandishments of large industrial nations is beginning to lessen. The spread of modern communication in Latin American nations, for example, has done much to erode the frequently complacent foreign orientation of capital cities and governing elites. Nationalist assertiveness, the rejection of foreign influences through economic restrictions which limit foreign ownership of communications media increasingly reflects a trend to value local cultural traditions. There is a pervasive openness to social change and in increasing international awareness in major institutions abroad such as those observed in the reformist Catholic Church. Churches are proclaiming identification with missions which emphasize desired social prestige, criticism of temporal injustice and national pride. These

trends reflect more than the traditional state of flux associated with the social, political, and economic domains of developing nations. It is becoming evident that reformist movements are acquiring institutionalized bases of power and legitimation, are less inclined toward fulminating revolutionary episodes, and may initiate changes from within governing institutions under essentially nonviolent conditions.

The leaders in developing nations face a new decade with a general mandate to produce major reforms. The status quo has few defenders. New leaders are coming from middle-class groups (Alba, 1970). Women, peasants, and unorganized labor are becoming aware of their potential influence through populist organizations. Universities have proliferated and diversified. Graduate programs have grown as have independent local research enterprises. Organizations in the various specialized fields in education reflect influence over the development and coordination of professionals in the educational sector. All of these observations suggest a growing familiarity with the modern world. Growing faith in international experimentation should enlarge the potential scope of policy alternatives.

The above observations suggest that to understand the course of developing nations in the years ahead, it will be essential to focus upon local empirical evidence and other data sets related to institutional processes. The critical consideration in international education hinges upon an awareness of the tendency toward ethnocentrism and the challenge to establish as the primary responsibility the understanding of the relativity of cultural values, learning those relevant values, and building those value considerations into the substance and method of our educational products.

Assumptions

Although developing nations are fundamentally suspicious of the intentions of the large industrial nations, they favor strengthened professional relationships. The nature of these relationships appear to be most productive when problems are addressed collaboratively, the relativity of alternative solutions is considered, and solutions are not imposed. Thus, the challenge is to build relationships outside of the traditional assistance-intervention framework. This would enable developing nations to shape their own futures and define their own interests while engaging in this effort in collaboration with others in the world community. The challenge offered here is to replace the traditional assistance/intervention model in international development with a transactional/interactive model.

The potential success of the efforts to study education in a world community rests fundamentally in the spectrum of national policy considerations regarding such relationships. The nations of the world need to examine their current policies and consider: (1) that constructive international relations are predicated upon mutual acceptance of diversity; (2) seeking constructive relationships by collaborating in the resolution of common problems and interests; (3) trading-in technical, commercial, and intellectual enterprises and terminate concessional military assistance programs; and (4) fostering improved understanding of the world in the world perspective. With the above foundational issues considered, the more specific circumstances of relating education to the broader world community come into focus.

In viewing the practices associated with comparative education operationally, certain features emerge. Those working in comparative education are most often reasonably well armed with the customary arsenal of knowledge of the literature, related behavioral science theory, research paradigms,

and often some years of practical experience as educators. We sometimes travel to other nations assuming preparation to teach, advise, and otherwise consult. We are sometimes able to cross language barriers through knowledge and skills in other languages. We teach, advise, and consult intensively, albeit frequently over relatively short periods of time, but rarely listen and observe. Seldom are robust evaluation considerations incorporated into our schema. We are rewarded, praised, and often envied. Yet, the evidence of our successes is spotty and rarely varifiable.

The literature, theory, and research in education, as well as our methodologies, are ethnocentric. Our efforts in international education are biased if not often imperialistic. We seldom know the cultures even cognitively much less affectively. We do the only thing we can do under these circumstances and capriciously generalize to populations not considered in the construction of our training models. This indictment necessitates consideration of the epistemological nature of our training models and relevant substantive paradigms.

The social sciences provide most of the conceptual currency in which education trades. The social sciences model upon natural order and in so doing establish a sense of worldly equilibrium. This results in a perceived rightness about our world view. That which we perceive is reality. Theories relate on this basis to "common sense." Thus, beliefs and practices in education can be thought of as true or false. Truth is derived directly from awareness of reality, and falseness, or lack of truth, is accounted for by bias or perceptual distortions. The accumulation of the body of knowledge associated with education is a stockpile of truths related to observable experience.

Observable experience is the potential contaminant of truth. Observations are culturally specific, and when these observations lead to assumptions, the assumptions become cognitive and technical norms (Mulkay, 1969). Assumptions in turn define the act of research and delimit solutions accordingly. Definitions from these norms constitute an academic violation. Acceptance of the norms of education create a cohesive community of scholars harmonious through intellectual consensus. Our colleagues, clients, and peers in other nations may, but more likely may not, be able to assume eligibility to become communicants. Kuhn (1970) argues that there is a universal acceptance of current paradigms to the exclusion of nonconformists. As we work in international education, we tend to invalidate the experience (Laing, 1967) of those of other nations by assuming our models are universal. They in turn become socialized by our arsenals of knowledge and abdicate, or they rebel and subsequently reject that which we profess. Either condition retards the potential progress of nations and international education.

Students of education must close their ranks. The homogeneity of the educational community would result in what Mulkay (1972) refers to as the condition necessary for rapid accumulation of scientific knowledge. This homogeneity is a necessary sociological ingredient to establish the medium of trust and collaboration to begin to account for and deal with domains of variance which retard our research and theory development in the world community. A consensus of scientific commitment and investigation is the principal ingredient to the rapid growth of bodies of precise and generalizable knowledge.

When a series of related assumptions or paradigms which are generally accepted in an academic area guide research in that field, these paradigms are "normal science" (Kuhn, 1970). The paradigms establish the sign posts that we follow in addressing problems. The paradigms are precise, even

quantifiable, and in their status of assumed generalizability somewhat temptingly thought to be exportable across cultural boundaries. Commitment to paradigms in education enable us to assume the credibility of the underlying assumptions. In this manner the "normal science" of education is accumulated, reified and deified.

It is in the underlying assumptions of our paradigms where much of our presumptousness about the culture-free nature of these paradigms originates. The adherents of the dominant paradigms in education show little awareness of or consciousness about the possibility of alternative paradigms. These adherents, furthermore, seem to be insensitive to the degree to which their methods of scientific inquiry are based upon a relatively restrictive philosophical/epistemological view of the world. Our adherence to the dominant paradigms has retarded our scientific efforts to understand and practice education. We are unable to perceive our shortcomings and our incarceration within our traditional methods of inquiry. Kuhn's solution to this problem occurs in science through revolution against existing orderliness and orthodoxy. Such revolutions begin and are fostered by the observation and accumulation of theoretical anomalies, findings which cannot be consistently reconciled by the paradigms. Such anamolies do appear in the experiences of those of us who transport and profess the paradigms in education across cultural boundaries. Clearly, the central issue of heightening the likelihood of increasing success in international education is legitimizing the consideration of anomalies perceived in intercultural work to be reflected back to the underlying assumptions of our paradigms. This is the criterion of scientific excellence which is needed to extend the scope of education into the international arena. In this manner new paradigms will emerge and paradigm shifts will occur as anomalies are reconciled. Scientific excellence does not triumph as we

continue to attempt to convert the international community to our ways, but rather as we foster a new generation of peers and include the world community in our fields of vision.

Conclusions

Insuring a future of greater success in international education necessitates (1) establishing and insuring a continuing contact and dialogue with other nations in general and specifically with our colleagues in other nations (Wiggins and Lynch, 1977); and (2) a continuing examination of our underlying assumptions, paradigms, and resultant processes in education to insure their relativity to the world community.

The current trend is to view international education as primarily an issue of multicultural understanding and collaboration. Nations are analyzing their policy foundations, systems, and values from the perspective of internationalism rather than nationalism. This analysis identifies and clarifies the forces which effect well-being and begins to focus upon similarities of human aspiration. As these forces are understood and shared, educators from various nations could formulate and contribute genuinely creative solutions to common educational problems. Historically, this current trend is an optimistic leap from earlier trends which assumed that education could be transplanted or grafted, thus gaining the dubious distinction of being referred to as education as cultural imperialism (Carnoy, 1974).

Efforts to internationalize education necessitate a capacity on the part of nations to work together in defining and implementing the management of educational issues. Designs must emphasize cross-cultural considerations rather than simply prescribing one nation's answers. Continued success will be dependent upon our ability to learn from and be changed by the international experience.

The promotion of the study of education has grown during the last few decades to include nations in all parts of the world (Culbertson, 1978). Although national leadership has emerged, leaders have often reflected the exportation of United States models. Frequently, the leaders in other nations have been trained in the United States. The emergence and influence of internationalism in the theory, research, and practice of education is slow at best. Perhaps when we achieve success in the establishment of regions-of-nations communities, the time will arrive for us to focus our energies upon the necessary planning for a world community of nations to complete the internationalization of our interests.

In the meantime we must attempt to better understand the challenges regarding the indictments of national provincialism which retard the generalizability of the study of education. We must broaden the scope of and enrich our research paradigms so as to include our wider population of concern. We must be ever diligent in relating our broader, world-oriented research back to the relevant bodies of theory from which it is derived. Thus, anomalies will be detected, culturally specific residuals will be identified and eliminated, and the necessary paradigm shifts will advance the knowledge of education to meet the challenge of the emergent world community.

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